

**Marissa Belles**

[The Arizona Republic](#)

A Gilbert educator was among five teachers honored by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Tempe, for beginning their career through the Troops to Teachers program.

The program is a joint effort by the federal education and defense departments to help eligible military personnel begin a new career as teachers in public schools.

Amos Chiarappa of Gilbert Public Schools was one of the educators, all with five years' experience, who were honored in a ceremony at Kyrene de la Colina Elementary School in Ahwatukee. A veteran with 21 years in the Navy, he was an information technologist who became an explosives expert in Iraq.

"I first read about Troops to Teachers in the military newspaper and figured this would be my next mission," Chiarappa said.

Chiarappa began his non-military teaching career at Chinle Unified School District in the heart of the Navajo Reservation. He started the school's first robotics team and helped students obtain scholarships.

He now works as a K-12 special-education case manager.

"This program helped give me the tools and resources to earn my certification," Chiarappa said.

John D. Scheuer, program manager for Arizona's Troops to Teachers office, said veterans bring special skills to the classroom.

"In addition to discipline, many of our teachers are highly trained in the areas of what we call STEM, science, technology, electronics and math," Scheuer said.

Robert Hartland a fifth-grader at Colina, agreed. He said his teacher, Arlyn Sykes, made math and science more enjoyable.

"Instead of just telling us how to do a problem, he will relate it back to something in real life," Hartland said. "He was good because he actually did some real-world stuff with math; he doesn't just teach it."

Mitchell said Arizona ranks eighth in the nation for the number of returning troops who have transitioned into education careers. "Bringing engineers and technicians into the classroom not only helps veterans start a new career, it also helps the students get the education they need to compete in a global economy," Mitchell said.

Mitchell is a former high school teacher, and chairman of the Veterans Affairs' Oversight and Investigation committee in the House of Representatives. Mitchell is co-sponsoring the Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act. If passed, it would extend the eligibility for the \$5,000 stipend to any troop-turned-teacher who stays three years in a school that serves a largely poverty-level student body.